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ON THE QUESTION OF THE PERIOD OF THREAT (PAST AND PRESENT)

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[Text] Historical experience shows that an aggressor's initiation of war usually was preceded by a period of threat, which represents a "segment of time characterized by a supreme intensity of the military-political situation and an extreme aggravation of contradictions between hostile parties,"¹ and it can be of varying duration. A trend has been seen toward a reduction in its time frames. A detailed study of this period is of great importance under present-day conditions in the matter of strengthening national defense. A comprehensive analysis of measures which an aggressor may take in preparing for war, especially on the eve of an attack, permits better understanding of the essence and content of the period of threat, a more precise determination of the enemy's possible operating methods and symptoms of immediate military threat, and timely and most complete preparation to repel an attack.

In preparing for war in the past, an aggressor country would carry out numerous foreign policy, domestic policy, economic, military and other measures long before its initiation and immediately before an attack to give itself the most favorable conditions and achieve major successes at the very beginning of the war. While having a number of similar characteristics and features, measures taken in different countries substantially differed in content from each other. Two periods were typical of the parties' preparation: general preparation of the country and armed forces for war, and concluding measures for an attack or to repel an attack, i.e., the period of threat.

General preparation of the country and armed forces for war was accomplished by imperialist governments over many years and was carried out at accelerated rates and continuously for the purpose of building up military-economic and military potentials. This allowed bringing military production up to a scale ensuring supply of the wartime army and navy with weapons and combat equipment and creating the necessary superiority in forces and assets. Along with intensive preparations of his armed forces and economy for war, the aggressor would take all possible steps to destabilize the situation in states against which an attack was being prepared and would strive to isolate them politically and economically.

Determining the precise bounds between an aggressor's general preparations for war, which can last for years, and the period of threat is very complicated, but an analysis of wars of the 20th century permits identifying the most common characteristics of the period immediately preceding the initiation of war. The principal period is characterized by extreme activation of the attacking side's military preparations above all and in all directions.

In the foreign policy area it is a sharp aggravation of international tension, high diplomatic activeness, intensive talks with allied countries, and foreign policy isolation or a break-off of diplomatic relations with the country against which an attack is being prepared. The urgent return home of citizens living abroad and the destruction of secret correspondence and codes in embassies and so on also serve as indicators of the imminence of war.

In domestic policy it is the violence of the reaction; stirring up of militarist and chauvinist sentiments and hatred for the country against which an attack is planned; the persecution of progressive parties, organizations and individuals; establishment of rigid censorship; and introduction of restrictions on the press, radio and other media.

In the economic area it is a comprehensive increase in production of arms and other kinds of military products, the secret shift of industry to a wartime footing, a change in the operating regime of railroads and maritime transport, a sharp increase in volume of military transport movements, the concentration of vessels in areas and at points of possible troop embarkation, establishment of additional stores of strategic raw materials and basic supplies and so on.

Military measures, usually conducted secretly, are the most important and persuasive indicators of the period of threat: stepped-up reconnaissance in all spheres, especially in areas near the border; placement of various weapons and large strategic formations and large units near the border in the highest conditions of readiness; mobilization; reinforcement and deployment of offensive force groupings especially under the guise of exercises; a build-up in capabilities of command and control and communications systems; communication of assignments to executing entities; rebasing aircraft to temporary airstrips and so on.

The makeup and duration of the period of threat were dissimilar prior to every war and depended on a large number of factors: international and domestic situation, objectives of war, the sides' military and economic potentials, level of combat readiness of the army and navy and so on. As a rule, wars were initiated after a gradual build-up in tension in the international situation or under conditions of its abrupt aggravation. In any case, however, the sides would place armed forces in a higher condition or in total combat readiness and carry out their strategic deployment. For example, in 1904 during a period of threat which lasted around a month, Japan prepared its Navy for a surprise attack on the Russian squadron at Port Arthur and supported the redeployment of one army into South Korea. In a period of threat which lasted exactly a month on the eve of World War I, the Tripartite Alliance and the Entente deployed their armies and began shifting economies to a wartime footing.

World War II was prepared and arose differently. Previously used methods of preparing and initiating wars, which provided first for a declaration of war and then for mobilization, concentration and strategic deployment of armed forces, were decisively rejected and replaced by new ones. This showed up most typically in measures taken by the governments of fascist Germany and militarist Japan.

In attempting to implement its plans for winning world domination, the Hitler leadership began a sharp increase in the army and navy in the spring of 1939. Wartime armed forces were created on the basis of the mobilization plan for 1939-1940, which included accelerated deployment of the Wehrmacht immediately before the war and a general or partial mobilization. In May 1939 six army headquarters, 11 army corps headquarters and 24 divisions were placed in a condition of combat readiness. This was the beginning of the period of intensive general preparations for war. The measures taken permitted fascist Germany, even before the beginning of general mobilization, to create an invasion army which included 35 percent of the wartime ground forces, 85 percent of panzer divisions, 100 percent of motorized and light infantry divisions and 63 percent (i.e., almost two-thirds of the forces being deployed) of forces earmarked for combat operations in the East.²

The rates and scope of mobilization measures increased after Germany's fascist leadership made the decision to invade Poland. In June 1939 the Wehrmacht command began to carry out a secret strategic deployment of armed forces, which for Poland was the beginning of the period of threat. By this time, as a result of the overt mobilization which had taken place, cadre German divisions already were being kept up under wartime strength levels. Reserve divisions also were mobilized in advance (secretly) in the form of partial mobilizations. As a result, fascist Germany's ground forces numbered over 2.7 million and the reserve army around a million persons by 1 September 1939.³

In preparing for war, Japan carried out a gradual deployment of its forces based on a plan which envisaged an increase in the number of divisions from 24 to 51 by 1941.⁴ Japan's ground forces numbered 2.1 million persons by the end of 1941 and the overall strength of the armed forces exceeded 2.4 million.⁵

Other capitalist countries also conducted secret mobilization within the scope of the period of threat, but very belatedly. For example, Poland began mobilizing its army seven days before the war, and England and France 10-12 days before the war. Fascist Germany carried out a deployment of armed forces and other concluding measures considerably earlier than its enemies, which allowed it to conduct a number of successful blitzkrieg-campaigns and individual operations.

One of the most important reasons for the defeat of armies of the states which were attacked was their absence of decisive responding actions in the period of threat to place armed forces in combat readiness to repel aggression. All this led to catastrophic consequences.

Fascist Germany prepared comprehensively and more carefully for the attack on the Soviet Union, which was a strong enemy. Immediate preparation for the treacherous attack on the USSR began immediately after the signing of the

document on France's surrender, when the German High Command was focused on a war with the Soviet Union in late June 1940. The Hitler leadership carried out additional measures for the Wehrmacht's mobilization deployment. Four new field army headquarters, four panzer group headquarters, 16 corps headquarters and 58 divisions were constituted as part of the army.⁶ Fascist Germany could make unhindered use of weapons, military equipment, gear and ammunition captured in occupied countries from 12 British, 22 Belgian, 18 Dutch, 6 Norwegian, 92 French and 30 Czechoslovak divisions. In France alone it seized 3,000 aircraft and around 5,000 tanks (including ammunition transporters).⁷

The strategic concentration of fascist Germany's armed forces was conducted in advance and surreptitiously. It began back in July 1940, when 18th Army Headquarters and 16 divisions were moved to the Soviet border, but the Wehrmacht's immediate deployment for the attack was conducted by echelon from February through June 1941. In our view, this segment of time comprised the period of threat. Troops assigned to participate in the offensive with the onset of war advanced in the first four echelons, and the Army High Command Reserve was the fifth echelon.

One feature of the period of threat is a reinforcement of all kinds of disinformation, which acquired strategic significance with respect to certain countries. It was used rather successfully before the invasion of Poland, Belgium, Holland, France and the Balkans. Priority attention was given to the problem of *secrecy* of invasion preparations. The mission of ensuring strategic surprise was assigned not only to the military command, but also to other state agencies. The leading role in the set of measures aimed at attaining it rested with political, diplomatic and military camouflage, concealment and deception. All its forms were carried out in accordance with an overall concept with strict centralization of leadership. The principal objective of camouflage, concealment and deception was to conceal the invasion preparation from enemy intelligence and keep the concepts and plans of upcoming operations secret. Primary emphasis was placed on ensuring secrecy of intentions to attack a given country as well as of the axes of main attack, time of invasion, and measures of strategic deployment of armed forces.

An entire set of political-diplomatic and operational-strategic measures, which assumed unique forms in each war, served to ensure secrecy of strategic deployment. For example, in preparing for the invasion of Poland, fascist Germany's leaders artificially created tension in political relations with Poland and maintained an atmosphere of uncertainty in their development for a long time. Talks were held almost until the war itself on a peaceful settlement of the "Polish corridor" issue. The concentration of large panzer and motorized units was explained by their participation in maneuvers, and reinforcement of 3d Army in East Prussia allegedly was being conducted to celebrate the victory there over the Russian 2d Army in 1914, scheduled for the period from 26 August through 2 September 1939.⁸

Prior to the invasion of France the troop concentration and deployment was camouflaged by various political statements about Hitler's desire for a peaceful resolution of contradictions with western powers. Taking into account the antisoviet direction of their policy, he expressed a readiness to consolidate efforts for a joint campaign against the USSR.

During the Wehrmacht's preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union, specially developed disinformation measures served the purpose of operational-strategic camouflage, concealment and deception. Among them were operations which were actually conducted or were only worked out. They were united by a common task of diverting attention from broad preparations for the war against the USSR. For example, under cover of Operation Marita (the aggression against Greece and Yugoslavia), the fascist German command moved troops to the eastern borders and shifted the operation of rail transportation to a maximum traffic schedule. Under the plan of Operation Harpune (the invasion of England from the territory of Norway), fascist German troops were concentrating for an upcoming offensive in the Soviet Arctic.⁹ The provocative proposal to join the Tripartite Pact made to the Soviet Union in November 1940 was supposed to attest to the allegedly peaceful intentions of the fascist government.

Having uncovered German intentions in time, the Communist Party and Soviet state performed enormous work of preparing the country to repel aggression. Defense sectors of industry were being developed at accelerated rates, the General Staff was working out a new plan of strategic deployment toward the end of 1940, there was a further increase in the numerical strength of the USSR Armed Forces and they were re-equipped. In June 1941 they had over five million persons,¹⁰ more than 67,000 guns and mortars, 1,861 T-34 and KV tanks, 2,739 aircraft of new types, and 563 combatant ships including 287 motor torpedo boats. Major measures were being implemented to constitute and reorganize large and small units. For example, whole on 1 September 1939 there were 25 rifle corps headquarters, 96 rifle divisions and one motorized rifle division, by the beginning of the Great Patriotic War there were 62 rifle corps headquarters and 198 rifle divisions (of which 19 were mountain rifle and 2 were motorized rifle). The activation of tank and motorized divisions, which as a rule were part of nine mechanized corps that had been established, began in 1940. Activation of another 20 mechanized corps began during February-March 1941.

Seventy-nine air divisions and five air brigades had been activated by the moment of fascist Germany's invasion of the USSR. Long-range bomber aviation consisted of 13 bomber divisions and 5 fighter divisions, and front and army aviation consisted of 61 divisions. The number of air regiments increased more than 80 percent by June 1941 compared with the beginning of 1939. At the same time, activation of five air corps of long-range bomber aviation which were a High Command asset concluded. The creation of national air defense fighter aviation began by the transfer of 40 fighter air regiments (around 1,500 aircraft)¹¹ to operational subordination of the air defense command and activation of special fighter corps for screening important strategic installations.

In April 1941 the aggressor began strategic deployment of the Wehrmacht. Under these conditions, in the interests of establishing operational-strategic Red Army forces, the People's Commissariat of Defense and the General Staff by direction of the party Central Committee and Soviet government began to carry out a number of measures for strategic deployment of the Armed Forces in the western part of the country. In mid-May four armies began moving up there

from interior military districts and another three simultaneously readied for redeployment. These seven armies comprised the second strategic echelon. The overall volume of movements from interior military districts to border districts was 939 rail consists.¹²

Thus the Communist Party and Soviet state used both the stage of the aggressor's general preparations for war as well as the period of threat for the maximum build-up possible under those conditions of the country's military-economic potential, for strengthening combat power and for supporting the strategic deployment of the Army and Navy.

CPSU Central Committee Politburo Candidate Member and USSR Minister of Defense MSU S. L. Sokolov notes: "But it would be incorrect to say that we succeeded in anticipating everything correctly and doing everything necessary before the war. . . . The changed conditions of the initial period of war and methods of repelling an aggressor's surprise attack were not quite correctly considered."¹³ In the period of threat we did not succeed in ensuring adequate reaction to the aggressor's final preparatory measures for the attack above all. Miscalculations in determining the possible time of Germany's attack on the Soviet Union and omissions in preparations to repel the Wehrmacht's first blows played their role. The fascist army's treacherous invasion did not allow concluding a strategic deployment of the Army and Navy by the beginning of military operations or creating force groupings prescribed by plans. As a result the actual force ratios in the first echelons of troops were in the enemy's favor, and on a number of axes he exceeded Soviet troops by 3-4 times. The superiority was even more significant on axes of his main attacks, which permitted the fascist German troops to seize the strategic initiative and temporarily occupy considerable areas of our territory. Exceptional efforts of the Communist Party, the entire Soviet people and their Armed Forces were required to overcome the enormous hardships caused by the grave consequences of the aggressor's surprise attack.

The stern lessons of the initial period of war teach supreme vigilance, keeping careful track of the probable aggressor's military preparations, assuring a parity of forces, and comprehensively strengthening the combat power and combat readiness of Army and Navy forces. Military cadres are obligated to accomplish these tasks with consideration of changes in the military-political situation and in the development of military affairs.

In the past it took an aggressor months and weeks to place his forces and assets in final readiness for attack. Under present-day conditions this time period can number in the hours or even minutes under certain circumstances. The probable enemy now has powerful nuclear and conventional weapons and has established those force groupings which can be employed for surprise attack at any time.

According to views of the U.S. military leadership, the most important conditions for success are a powerful initial surprise attack, swift and maximum use of fire for effect, and consolidation of its results. This was displayed most graphically in the operations of its armed forces in local wars in Korea (1950-1953) and Indochina (1964-1975). Surprise of an attack is assessed by the leadership of the aggressive NATO bloc as one of the primary

preconditions for winning victory. Well-known U.S. military theorist B. Brodie wrote: "The side which is first to deliver an attack on condition that it is sufficiently well conceived, planned and prepared obtains good opportunities either for complete elimination of the enemy's capability to deliver a retaliatory attack or for disorganizing the forces earmarked for this attack."¹ It is not by chance that the concepts of warmaking adopted by armies of imperialist states place primary emphasis on surprise delivery of a preemptive strike with the calculation that this will assure them of seizing the strategic initiative and having superiority in subsequent conduct of the war. To prevent a surprise attack it is necessary to constantly maintain high vigilance and combat and mobilization readiness, and resolutely take specific steps to repel it. Therefore the task of constant readiness for an immediate transfer of armed forces and the entire national economy from a peacetime to a wartime footing and for a resolute rebuff to aggression assumes special state importance.

Experience shows that aggressors strive for a maximum reduction in the period of threat. According to views of the U.S. and NATO military-political leadership, the following are the principal measures for reducing the duration of the period of threat: placing troops or forces in the highest combat readiness; creating force groupings in border areas under the pretext of widescale exercises, reservists' active duty training, deployment of command posts and other measures; as well as secret mobilization. At the same time it must be taken into account that the NATO bloc countries together even now have enormous coalition armed forces capable of delivering a powerful surprise attack. To this end, as exercise experience attests, they plan to use either deployed forces of the first strategic echelon or powerful missile and air assets for the first "disorganizing" attack, following which combat operations of ground forces will begin.

Under certain conditions there also may not be a period of threat, especially in case a decision is made to employ nuclear weapons or for the massive use of precision weapons. The aggressor will attempt to initiate war by a surprise attack using modern means of warfare as well as major combat-ready army and navy force groupings deployed in theaters. To this end, as historical experience shows, the enemy may conduct political, diplomatic and strategic disinformation, shorten the deployment time of armed forces as much as possible, take those actions for which the other side is least prepared, execute an attack by army or navy force groupings without their preliminary deployment at the borders, and use new kinds of weapons, including previously unknown ones, in mass numbers. An attack can be prepared under cover of major troop exercises. Lately they have been characterized by enormous scope and it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish them from real deployment of armed forces for an attack.

It should be borne in mind that under present-day conditions an aggressor does not necessarily have to deploy his troops along state borders to carry out an invasion. Under certain circumstances he can deliver powerful strikes by aviation and missiles in a stand-off mode and move into the offense with ground forces directly from permanent deployment garrisoning locations or from areas where exercises are being held.

The following methods of initiating a war are regarded as the most likely: a surprise attack by forward groupings of armed forces created back in peacetime; an attack after partial mobilization deployment and accelerated reinforcement of forward force groupings; and an attack following mobilization and operational deployment of army and navy forces.

Assuming greatest importance in this connection is an advance comprehensive, correct estimate of the most likely options of a probable enemy's operations and on this basis assurance of a timely, adequate reaction to any military preparations of the aggressor.

The nature, content and direction of measures being taken which have a direct effect on the length of the period of threat depend to a decisive extent on what kind of resources the aggressor intends to use to begin the war. For example, in making a decision for initiating military operations using conventional weapons, he will require the additional deployment of force groupings on axes of planned attacks. In a nuclear war these measures are reduced to a minimum and the period of threat may be absent or be very brief. In preparing to initiate war, the aggressor will carry out various methods of contrived camouflage, concealment, deception and disinformation in order to hide the true purpose of preparatory measures. One must be fully armed against any chance occurrences by preparing for this constantly, daily, hourly and at all levels. This requires a further increase in vigilance and combat readiness of the Armed Forces, comprehensive intensification of combat training of Army and Navy forces, and extremely active elaboration of the most important problems of the theory and practice of military affairs.

Under present-day conditions a disturbance in the balance of forces or belated countermeasures against an aggressor's hostile preparatory actions are simply inadmissible. In his speech at the March 1985 Extraordinary CPSU Central Committee Plenum, CPSU Central Committee General Secretary, Comrade M. S. Gorbachev declared: "In the complex international situation it has never been more important to keep our Motherland's defensive capability at such a level that potential aggressors know full well that infringing on security of the Soviet Land and its allies and on the peaceful life of Soviet citizens will be met by a crushing retaliatory blow. Our glorious Armed Forces will continue to have everything necessary for this purpose."¹⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. "Sovetskaya Voyennaya Entsiklopediya" [Soviet Military Encyclopedia], Vol 8, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1980, p 170.
2. "Nachalnyy period voyny" [The Initial Period of War], Moscow, Voenizdat, 1974, p 131.
3. "Istoriya vtoroy mirovoy voyny 1939--1945" [History of World War II 1939-1945], Vol 2, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1974, p 377.
4. Hattori, T. "Japan in the War of 1941-1945," Moscow, Voenizdat, 1973, p 86.

5. Cohen. J. B. "Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction," Moscow, Izd-vo inostrannoy literatury, 1951, p 291.
6. "Istoriya vtoroy mirovoy voyny 1939--1945," Vol 3, p 319.
7. Ibid., Vol 12, 1982, p 196.
8. Proektor, D. M. "War in Europe 1939-1941," Moscow, Voenizdat, 1963, p 28.
9. "Nachalnyy period voyny," p 194.
10. "Istoriya voyennogo iskusstva" [History of the Military Art], Moscow Voenizdat, 1984, p 123.
11. "Istoriya vtoroy mirovoy voyny 1939--1945," Vol 3, pp 418, 420, 421, 422, 425, 427.
12. "Voyennyye soobshcheniya za 50 let" [Fifty Years of Military Transportation], Moscow, Voenizdat, 1967, p 46.
13. Feb 1985, p 6.
14. Brodie, B. "Strategy in the Missile Age," Moscow, Voenizdat, 1961, p 252.
15. "Materialy vneocherednogo Plenuma Tsentralnogo Komiteta KPSS, 11 marta 1985 goda" [Materials of Extraordinary CPSU Central Committee Plenum, 11 March 1985], Moscow, Politizdat, 1985, p 13.